

*In the name of God, who makes us, loves us, and keeps us. Amen*

In this eighth chapter of the Book of First Samuel, the author gives us readers the opportunity to sit in on a curious, intimate conversation between God and the prophet Samuel, and I have to tell you, this is one of my favorite Bible passages. Almighty God, Lord of heaven and earth, is having a conversation with a human sympathizer, a sort of spiritual close friend, this prophet who has been tied so closely to the people, the Israelites. And we are invited to eavesdrop. And what is this conversation about? Well, God and Samuel are commiserating with each other about the state of humankind. In so many words, Samuel is sharing his frustration that the stubborn Israelites just won't listen to him, take his advice, or pay him any heed at all! This is a really personal admission from the prophet, an admission of failure. But he isn't apologizing to God that he hasn't done his prophetic job well, he is rather complaining about the lack of respect the people have given him. Try as he might, the people just won't take him seriously.

Can't you just picture God in this conversation shaking his head with understanding, joining Samuel in disappointment and frustration? With a sort of spiritual pat on the back, arm around the shoulders, friendly empathy, God tells Samuel that the people have been treating him the same way. After all these years of guiding these humans through thick and thin, the people are treating God the same way they are treating Samuel: with disrespect and sarcasm. After all, God says in so many words, I have made them, I have loved them, and I have tried to keep them, keep them healthy and happy and safe from all manner of misfortune and enemies. And now, that hasn't been enough for them?! What am I, chopped liver?! Don't take it so personally, Samuel, they are treating me the same way, these stubborn, stiff-necked, ungrateful people. You and I are insufficient, they have said. Now they want some worldly hero, some heroic king to lead them and make them feel important!

So, mid-way between Mother's Day and Father's day, like we are this morning, God, the universal parent who has really important meetings going on at work, gets a call from Samuel the babysitter, who says that the kids are being brats. They won't do their homework, and they won't go to bed without a treat of ice cream with chocolate sauce and whipped cream. Having heard all this before, God authorizes Samuel, with reluctance, to let the kids have what they want, but to warn them that when all that sugar gives them nightmares, it will be their own fault. When they are facing the teacher unprepared tomorrow, don't come running to me with tears and fears, because Samuel and I told you so! We let you have your own way, and now you will face the consequences. So, you want to have a warrior-king like all the other kids? Be prepared, and be careful what you wish for! Let me tell you what I predict from my adult experience...

Putting your trust and your security in the hands of a worldly king with worldly values, choosing to follow someone other than your loving spiritual parent, will bring you nothing but trouble. I love you more, says God, than some random strongman. The way of the world, the world I created but which has been corrupted, is one of lust for power and taking advantage. This king you expect will bring you good fortune at home and on the battlefield, will use you and your favorite possessions for his own benefit, disregarding both your persons and the promise you think he made to you. It will not end well. It never does. Take my Word for it, says God. But, since I love you, I will let you have what you think you want. Since I love you, I will work with you to make the best of it; I

will always work with you. I am the one you can truly count on. I will never abandon you, my children. If you insist on a king, I will send my Spirit of prophecy to advise him. Now, I know that you can't see that far ahead yet, but when the time comes I will send the prophet Nathan to be a conscience for King David, and the Roman emperors will have their Popes, and the English Kings and Queens will have their Archbishops of Canterbury, and, trust me, I might even send someone like Billy Graham to whisper in the ear of American presidents. I will be there, even if I go unnoticed.

But, please don't rebel so inflexibly that our household should become divided and divorced. Even Satan, the master of deceit and destruction, couldn't hold his realm together if his demons were disloyal to his insidious cause. Remember that I am your true parent, says God, and that you are truly brothers and sisters to one another. Disagree if you must, but let our house stand together in sacred intent, undivided in common purpose and nurtured with respectful love for one another. And please, don't rigidly deny our Holy Spirit access to your lives. The Spirit with which I created you, the Spirit which I have passed on to you as from parent to child, is the breath which sustains you. If you say it isn't so, if you won't receive it and its benefits, then you will die and there will be nothing I can do about it. That denial might be called the only truly unforgivable sin, for, no matter how hard I try or how much I want to, our Holy Spirit won't be able to penetrate that wall you build around yourself. You are the human family; make every day Mother's Day *and* Father's Day, and celebrate our family Spirit within you and around you. Our family vine has many fruits ready to be harvested. Don't turn your backs on them with skepticism; they are loving gifts from me and from you brothers and sisters.

So (God continues, in so many words) Samuel your babysitter tells me that after my warnings about the unreliability of this "king" you want so badly, you said "No! We are determined to have a king over us, so that we also may be like other nations." Well, I have said that it is time for you to grow-up and make your own decisions, so I will help you as best I can. Oh, some will say that I have lost my mind, that I am going crazy, but I love you all. Can't you see that I don't want you to be ill or disadvantaged or possessed? My own begotten Son and I will work tirelessly to try to help you and heal you. As it turns out, he won't even take time off for meals or a good nap! We have your best interests at heart, as you ought to have for one another, unlike some random heroic potentate you think will save you. And Samuel also tells me that you've said that you are determined to have this king go out before you and fight your battles. Listen, my maturing children, it's never a good idea to depend on someone else to fight your own battles! Please don't always turn that responsibility over to someone else. It is good for your soul to engage yourself, your heart and your mind, with the troubling issues of your day and of your generation. Find the courage to confront that which is disturbing you; you'll find it there in that package of gifts I gave you when I created you.

And, children, when you *do* decide that you want to talk about things, when you finally realize that you would like my help and my counsel, when you would appreciate a personal, even private, conversation, then do what Samuel did. In this Biblical passage, you read that "Samuel prayed to the Lord." My friend Samuel didn't go to some earthly authority for a chat, he came to me. He prayed. If you have demands for me, or questions, or requests, open a conversation with me in prayer. Pour out your heart to me, like Samuel did all those years ago. And maybe we'll shake our heads together in frustration and disappointment, or maybe we'll figure something out together, or maybe we'll tell each other stories, or maybe we'll just have a good laugh. Who knows? I long to hear your voice, says God, and will set aside everything else to just to hear it. Amen